

Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs

Performance Report



**Performance Results
Achieved for Fiscal Year 2015**

**Colonel Robert C. King (Ret)
Executive Director**

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Introduction

I am pleased to present the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA) Performance Report for 2015. This report contains information about the services provided to veterans and their families by our Department.

The mission of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs is to serve our veterans and their families. Our office is responsible for disseminating information to veterans regarding benefits and services available to them, maintaining military service records of Iowa veterans, and assisting veterans with benefit applications. We also administer several programs that provide direct assistance to veterans and their families.

We recognize our veterans' sacrifices and commitments as well as the honor that they have brought upon themselves, their families and communities, and the State of Iowa. Our Department works with the 99 county veteran's affairs offices and other agencies to assist and insure that our veterans receive the federal, state, and local benefits that they deserve and to which they are entitled.

The Department also operates and maintains the Iowa Veterans Cemetery. The cemetery is Iowa's only state-owned and operated cemetery. Veterans of any branch and service, qualified spouses and dependents may be buried at the cemetery. They need not be Iowa citizens. We are very proud of the services that we provide to our veterans and their families at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery.

The operations tempo of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs is continually at a high level. Our small, but, highly qualified and motivated staff strives to provide the very best service possible to our veteran's community. This is our mission – "To Serve Our Veterans and Families". They have served their nation and state and now we are proud and honored to serve them.

Sincerely,

Colonel Robert C. King (Ret)
Executive Director

Department Overview

Mission

“Our mission is to serve veterans and families.”

We are dedicated to ensuring that Iowa veterans and their dependents receive the full measure of county, state, and federal benefits to which they are rightfully entitled.

The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Accomplishes Its Mission by:

- Providing leadership of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs staff and stewardship of resources directly related to supporting Iowa’s veteran and their families.
- Distributing information to veterans regarding benefits and services available to them.
- Promoting community awareness of our veterans’ service and support local programs.
- Providing direct care and assistance to veterans –
 - Iowa Trust Fund
 - Injured Veterans Grant Program
 - County Allocation Program
 - Honor Guard Reimbursement Program
 - Military Home Ownership Program in coordination with Iowa Finance Authority
 - Children of Fallen Iowa Service Members Scholarship (A Scholarship of the Branstad-Reynolds Scholarship Fund)
- Partnering with the federal Veterans Administration and county veterans service offices.
- Maintaining Iowa veterans’ military service records and graves registration.
- Assisting veterans with applications for federal and state benefits.
- Operating and maintaining the Iowa Veterans Cemetery.
- Upgrading and performing required maintenance to preserve our facilities and ultimately reduce long-term maintenance expenditures.
- Effective utilization and security measures for facilities and equipment.
- Comprehensive planned and coordinated direction, utilization of funding, personnel, and equipment to support operations of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Effective fiscal management of available agency funding support to provide the greatest impact on services to our veterans.
- Strict adherence to environmental stewardship programs.

Department Operations

Our staff members continually assesses their areas of responsibility. Using the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to serve, we identify priority issues and update our strategic objectives. We strive to improve our operations and use resources to the best advantage possible towards our mission of supporting our veterans and their families.

The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs is unique in the vast array of our key customers. This wide variance is due to our involvement with federal, state, and community entities and the wide span of jurisdictions and organizations in which we operate to complete our missions. Our customers include, but are not limited to:

- External customers – The United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Cemetery Administration.
- State of Iowa – The governor and citizens of the state and all state agencies, the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs and various other state boards and commissions. Support is provided by the Iowa Department of Public Defense, the Iowa National Guard Records Center, and the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum.
- Communities – The 99 county veteran's affairs offices, local governments and the members of the funeral director community.
- Other federal entities – Veterans cemetery, congressional delegation, National Cemetery Administration
- Civilians – Businesses, not-for-profit entities, media, and service organizations, and individuals.
- Veterans and military service members – active and retired – and their families.

Major Department Accomplishments during 2015

- The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs-employed benefits specialists have assisted veterans filing for federal benefits through the claims process amounts to \$2,520,989/monthly as of 30 June 2015.
- The Injured Veterans Grant program provided \$1,342,500 to qualified injured veterans during 2011-2013: 13 applications/\$87,500 in 2013. 11 applications/\$102,500 in 2014. 8 applications/\$62,500 in 2015.
- The Veterans Trust Fund has provided \$463,764.29 in entitlements to veterans in need during 2011-2013: 93 applications/\$173,844.00 in 2013. 167 applications/\$299,928.69 in 2014. 187 applications/\$312,502.81. 1081 application have been processed and approved since the program began on July 1, 2007.
- The Honor Guard Reimbursement program has dispersed \$416,015.00 during 2011-2014: 144 applications/\$153,470.00 in 2013 (included backlog processing). 178 applications/\$62,175.00 in 2014. 175 applications/\$60,725.00 in 2015.

- The County Allocations program distributed \$3,712,136.47 to our 99 counties for veteran's assistance during 2011-2014; \$955,475.71 in 2014, \$972,527.13 in 2015.
- Military Homeownership Grant program approved applications totaled 339 in 2013; 387 in 2014 and 439 a/o June 30, 2015.
- Our outreach programs, including our bi-monthly military/veterans-related events list, now reaches out to over 800 e-mail addresses and we are distributing information through Facebook as another way to reach veterans through social media.
- The "Veterans" designation on driver's licenses and non-operator identification cards has been issued to over 1000 veterans through Camp Dodge office in 2015.
- The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs website (<https://va.iowa.gov>) has become a recognized site for veterans' information, and is linked to a number of other organizations. We fielded a totally new Department website during 2015 to provide better service and access to information to our veterans and their families, and visitors to our website.
- The Executive Director, Executive Officer, and Outreach Coordinator reach out to a number of audiences and group, making the public more aware of our services and helping the veterans obtain entitled benefits.
- The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs organizes and conducts two annual Memorial Day and Veterans Day observances, the Wreaths across America ceremony at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery, and the Iowa State Fair Veterans Day parade to honor our veterans. We also provide leadership and support to the annual Governor's Volunteer Recognition program.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs recently co-sponsored a well-received and attended event with ARAG Group to provide free legal services to veterans and spouses. The location was moved to Jordan Creek Mall, West Des Moines, and the marketing efforts were increased. The third annual event next year is anticipated to grow in numbers again.
- The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs has developed a partnership with Principal Financial for the *Hiring Our Heroes* program.
- We are committed to the recently-announced Home Base Iowa program to attract veterans and service members leaving active duty to relocate to the State of Iowa to live and work. The Executive Director is on the Home Base Iowa Executive Committee.
- We created the Iowa Veterans Coalition consisting of representatives of various veterans' organizations to develop a concerted legislative agenda supported by the entire coalition. The annual Veterans Day on the Hill takes the Coalition's message to the legislature and public.
- The Iowa Veterans Cemetery provides a well-operated and maintained final resting place for over 2,650 veterans and family members.
- A \$1.2M (\$919,612/\$250,000) federal/state-funded construction program was completed at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery in 2015. This recently-completed 19-month project provides a 960-niche columbaria plaza, new pump house and water filtration system, and vehicle storage building addition.
- The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs accomplishes its mission with a staff of dedicated professionals: six working at the main office at Camp Dodge; seven at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery, and one at the downtown regional Office of the VA.

- The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs and the 99 county veteran's service officers are involved in our communities and are committed to assisting and supporting our veterans and, consequently, helping make Iowa a better place to live, to be educated, and to raise families.

2015 Funding

2015 State of Iowa General Fund – Department Operations	\$1,095,951
Total	\$1,095,951

Performance Plan Results

The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs strategic objectives and results are:

- Provide education, information, and benefits assistance to veterans. The 99 Iowa counties are provided \$10,000 of State-appropriated funds for assisting them with certain costs in operating their office and completing their mission of direct contact with and support of their county's veterans and families. These funds assist throughout the State veteran's network to provide more efficient service to veterans.

Over 98.2% (\$972,527.13 of \$990,000) of the county allocation funding was utilized during the year for the intended purpose. The Department goal is 100% utilization. This is a 1.5% increase of utilization over 2013. This has been accomplished by expanding the authorized uses of the funds and more creative ways to conduct outreach opportunities.

The unused funding is returned to the Department education account for to provide training and related continuing education units (CEU's) for the county VSOs. This is an excellent use of the remaining funding and allows us to upgrade our training facilitators and course content.

- A large measure of the ability of the county veteran's service officers (CVSO) is to earn and maintain throughout the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) accreditation. The Iowa Code requires them to become qualified within 12 months of assignment into their positions and to maintain accreditation by procuring 16 CEU's each year to remain qualified. State IDVA veteran service officers are accredited as well.

The Department goal is 95% county veteran service officer accreditation. This number is a very high goal as there can be frequent turnover in the county director's positions. During 2014 we achieved 96% CVSO accreditation and 100% in 2015.

- The Iowa Veterans Cemetery is a very visible part of our Department operations. The timeliness of the setting of headstones is of utmost importance as the families' expect and deserve to have their loved one's headstone on the grave in a timely manner.

The National Cemetery Administration's goal, which the Iowa Veterans Cemetery follows and adheres to, is 100% installation of headstones within 60 days of receipt of the headstone at the cemetery. This may be affected by weather and ground conditions and whether the headstone is received at the cemetery in 100% acceptable condition to be installed. The 2015 performance was 100%.

- The accuracy of the headstone inscriptions is vitally important to the cemetery and certainly to the veteran's families. This process is influenced by the accuracy of information provided to the cemetery by the funeral directors and the families as well as the cemetery staff's input into the National Cemetery Administration electronic system. During 2015 we achieved 100% accuracy of headstone inscriptions.
- The Department administers several direct assistance programs to support veterans and their families.

The Iowa Injured Veteran Grant program provides assistance to service members who are injured in a combat zone and require medical evacuation. Our goal is to support 100% of eligible service member's applications; this goal was achieved in 2015.

The Iowa Military Homeowners' Grant Program provides a State-appropriated \$5,000 grant to qualified service members. Our goal is to provide as many grants as possible in the year with the available funding. We, in conjunction with the Iowa Finance Authority, have distributed 439 homeowner grants during 2015 as of 30 June 2015.

The Iowa Veterans Trust fund provides several types of direct support to needy veterans. Examples include housing repairs, emergency medical care, dental expenses, eye glasses, hearing aids, prescriptions, automobile repair, etc. The program is administered by the Department. The applications are reviewed and approved by the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs. Our goal is 100% approval of received applications for assistance. During 2015, 187 qualified applications were received for a disbursement of \$312,502.81 towards various types of assistance.

Department Contact

Copies of the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs Performance Report are available by contacting Colonel Robert C. King (Ret), Executive Director, at 515-727-3444 or robert.king@iowa.gov.

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